

What was the Buddha doing?

THE QUESTION-->

Greeting Sister Khema,

I really got what you said about trying to understand with less confusion. I noticed that one word can just change the whole sentence and the meaning of it.

Just like when I play sitar, one note that is gone high or low, And I mean just one single note, it completely changes the mood of the raga and the audience.

How do we know whether we got it the way we suppose to?

To understand Buddha, one needs to experience Buddha?

I suppose just like anything in life, one needs to experience in order to believe or listen.

Normally when I talk about Buddha in my household, it gets brushed towards being a Buddhist and the rituals surrounded by it. In Nepal every second born in a Buddhist family gets sent to be a lama or nun. My husband comes from Nepal and he grew up with Lama doing all sorts of rituals so he normally identifies with that part.

Is what Buddha taught being misunderstood to some level?

Is Buddhism a religion? Can we not be a Buddhist and still follow in the path of Buddha?

With much love and smiles,
Radhika

Does Buddhism believe in rituals?

THE ANSWER:

Dhamma Greetings Radhika.

What is Buddhism?

First, I suggest you take a look at what Buddhism really is. Go over to www.dhammasukha.org and go into the Dhamma talks there, to the beginners section. There is a talk there by Bhante called "What is Buddhism?"

This talk will reveal pretty clearly what Buddhist teaching was all about in the beginning and a little about how it can still be practiced in the same way.

It is hard to find this basic practice inside some of the very ornate traditions today. It is in there, but, it is mostly really buried deeply or forgotten in translation.

Q: So what was the Buddha doing in the beginning?

A: the Buddha had figured out on his own how to observe clearly HOW everything actually is; the true nature of everything; HOW everything actually works, in this experience we call life, in this very existence.

i am referring to how he completely uncovered the natural line of Human Cognition with very succinct parts..

This means HOW a human being Cognizes (experiences) his life.

How does a person experience thoughts and feelings while living?

How does this work in connection with the human body and mind?

These are the questions he pursued and examined very deeply and later simplified them so we could use them in our life.

At that time, as an ascetic, the Buddha had the time to examine closely how all this works and he uncovered an impersonal process that he called the Process of Dependent Origination. It is composed of 12 parts, or links as we call them which depend on each other for their arising and passing away AND it happens in a very impersonal way while we live our lives.

The big deal about Buddhism in the beginning was that Buddha Gotama not only figured this process out, but,

he also was what was called a Teaching Buddha (a samasan Buddha) which was very unusual to have come forth. He managed to teach for 45 years following his own full awakening experience.

I want to point out that Buddhists called him "Lord" out of respect, not because he was a God. He was a human being, just like us, but one who had prepared for the discoveries he made over 100,000 lifetimes, or so we are told by living many pure lifetimes.

what he uncovered fully were the 4 Noble Truths which naturally lead onward to understanding exactly how everything really is.

Those truths were

1. There is Suffering
2. there is a cause of suffering.
3. There is a cessation of suffering.
4. There is a path to that cessation of suffering.

If you are a Buddhist today, you may notice there is a lot of confusion around about what he taught.

Many corruptions have taken place in these times.

The first Noble truth has been corrupted, for instance, to read as

"Life is Suffering". This change in Semantics is a real tragedy for people to hear.

For, although it is true that life has suffering in it, it is not true that a person has to go through life suffering all the time. If this were the case, then, there would be no use in a Buddha coming forth into the open. no one would listen to him.

So we must be very careful to hang onto the very good news that the first noble truth actually implies for us.

1. The First Noble Truth:

There is suffering.

The Buddha had to understand to the finest degree what precisely "suffering" is in order to understand how to let go of it, didn't he?

So the real point here, for this first noble truth was to have the student understand that the Buddha spent some very precise time quietly and carefully examining the true nature of suffering before he went further. Later, he taught us what he found so we would not have to spend as much time on this part.

Today if you had a car that was giving you a real problem, you could not fix it until you know what was wrong with it, could you? Well it was the same with his investigation into suffering. Unless he could identify the problem, he could not find the remedy for it.

The best definition of suffering that I have found in the texts sits in a Sutta which describes:

"Not getting what you want and suffering a great deal about this;

getting what you want and then having it fade away and suffering because it is gone;

getting what you don't want and having to struggle to make that stop;

getting exactly what you want and suffering because it changes!

This is suffering. It comes in all sizes and degrees like so much of the teaching of Buddhism. It is not locked into being ONE exact thing found in one small box!

When the meditator struggles to "fix" whatever situation arises; to personally control it, they suffer from the tension and tightness happening in both mind and body caused by this very mental, verbal and physical wrong effort they are making to try to control the present moment! One cannot change the truth and the present moment is the Truth. It is here, now.

2. The Second Noble Truth:

There is a cause of Suffering.

The next thing the Lord Buddha did was to stop and examine what very precisely the cause of arising tension and tightness might be which is at the heart of the suffering.

Through careful investigation described for us in the Samyutta Nikaya, the Buddha uncovered that there is an actual internal process going on inside each of us that a person with an untrained mind is not aware of and cannot detect.

That person with the untrained mind, without this knowledge, is at the mercy of this process and the suffering caused as it continues to run unchecked.

Today, this process is known in science as the Process of Human Cognition.
It is composed of 12 links.

When the Buddha uncovered these links, he examined them in the direction of uncovering how to relieve oneself from the point of suffering "Ageing and death, sorrow, lamentation, pain, grief and despair."
This point is simply called DEATH "OR" AGEING and DEATH link.

After he concluded how to have each of 11 other links cease, he examined how they actually came to arise in the first place!
Watching them arise is actually seeing HOW this whole mass of suffering comes to be.

Later he taught the monks and nuns how to instruct people how suffering arises,
and then teach them how to assist the cessation of those links which had caused the suffering.

This was all very systematic.
The Buddha left us information pointing to the fact that if a person is not taught this properly they cannot reach relief of the suffering.

At the center we are taught how to teach the links in the same way the Buddha taught them. I think this is why they are so clear to people.
When you come into the center, Bhante gives talks showing exactly how the Buddha did this and how you can copy exactly what he did. I often help support this by giving you ways to see it visually through charts and pictures.

The gift the Buddha gave us was the way to the cessation of suffering. He showed us the way out of suffering.

In the beginning period after his death, all ceremonies, rites and rituals were developed for the sole purpose of preservation of the teaching. Even early blessings were aligned with the teachings to add support to them in our minds. It was to help the priests, lamas, monks/nuns remember how to systematically teach the training and for lay people to imprint it in their minds too. But after a time, pride got in there and competitiveness as is in human nature. "I'm" better than you are, "MY" tradition is bigger than your tradition" and everything else that happened you can still find today by watching what is happening inside of any nursery school window, while the practice itself got shuffled aside.....

The monks and nuns find themselves in a difficult, deteriorating situation wondering how they would support themselves in the future. Their minds are often not on the teaching. Nor is their behavior an echo of it either in some cases.

To my own way of thinking, they have missed the fact that they started out with something priceless that doesn't seem to work anymore in the same way it did in the beginning. So now we have monks going back to work in robes, in lay life to get insurance policies or money for mortgages, to try to survive while the lay people stop supporting them so much as before.

But, still, the monastics don't seem to see that what they have to give is not priceless anymore but watered down. In spite of this many refuse to look back directly into the texts and re-valuate the situation!

This is quite a hard time for many traditions because of all this.
WE find them buying into what is handed down to them within lineages without questioning the practical use of it.

So the thing is, to be a Buddhist means to back up a minute. Stop and take a look at the engine of the car and see what is really going on in the engine! Don't just keep driving the car if it doesn't have any oil in it anymore!
STOP! REGROUP!

This doesn't mean give up proper respect. it doesn't mean invent a new practice anymore! it means take a look at what made this CAR exceptionally fine when it began running in the beginning. See if that still can be reclaimed.

Just take a breath and BACK up a minute. REGROUP and then continue on for the sake of the people.

3.

The Third Noble Truth EXTREMELY IMPORTANT. It is about why the Buddhist teaching was so precious! There is a cessation of suffering.

The Buddhist practice, if taught correctly, shows the student what suffering actually is, what causes this suffering to arise, it teaches you how to see the cessation of this suffering for yourself. When we experience it, we see what Cessation actually looks like and what the sensation is like both mentally and physically. Within the 4th Noble truth, when we begin to practice,.

then

4.

The Fourth Noble Truth

There is a path to the Cessation of suffering.

This is where you learn all of the preparatory foundation parts you need to fold together and to ready yourself for success in your meditation.

This is where you learn how to examine the engine of the car, go over the manual and you learn how to find out what is precisely wrong with the engine running smoothly AND what you need to do to keep it running.

You proceed on your journey to personally experience and see for yourself what the Buddha figured out. You begin to smile a lot more now in your life, because why? Because you KNOW! you have attained Knowledge and Vision and so, you know how this works.

This is a remarkable and most interesting journey.....

Q: how do you know if you progress or not?

A: The Buddha did not leave you alone on this. He left us a progress chart to go by.

Q: how do I know if I am developing properly or not?

A: The Buddha left us a few different developmental charts we could use to know where we are and what we have left to do. He did not leave this out either.

Q: Where will the path ultimately lead us?

A: The path leads you to balance. This kind of balance offers you the ability to lovingly accept the present moment just as it is.

Q: Did the Buddha leave us exercises to follow? Did he show us how to do our investigation so it would go directly to the answers we seek out?

A; Yes.

They simply indicate a circular process that continues to go around, just like a wheel turns, as long as we do not know they exist.

In short, there suffering caused by this process unless we are educated about exactly how it works. If we learn how the wheel gets it's energy for motion, then we can stop giving this energy into the wheel....

One of the links which supports the cause of suffering is called IGNORANCE. This link implies that the person is not enlightened about this process and is therefore unconsciously Ignoring this process as well as the questions these Four Noble truths lead us into.

That person, is therefore, at the mercy of the suffering this process causes if it runs unchecked.

There is much more to learn.... but it happens gradually.....

It is through practicing the 6Rs which are actually Right Effort and Striving that we learn how to free ourselves earlier and earlier in this line of links and get off the wheel of suffering in this very lifetime.

I hope this is a bit helpful for you.

I am off now to rest once again.....

Smiles to you all
Ven. Sister Khema
Dhamma Sukha Meditation Center